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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [SI](#)

SUBJECT: COMBATING EXTREMISM IN SLOVENIA

REF: A. SECSTATE 159129

[B](#). LJUBLJANA 740

[C](#). LJUBLJANA 603

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas B. Robertson for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY. Religious and political extremism are very rare in Slovenia. With a homogeneous population of only two million people, Slovenian society and politics function on the basis of strong social networks that foster a culture of compromise, consensus, and centrism. Nevertheless, the same factors that work to make Slovenia a tightly-knit community also create insularity and suspicion towards foreigners, which at times borders on intolerance and xenophobia. The latter is manifested most noticeably with regards to the 0.2 percent of the population (roughly 3,500 people) who are Roma and, to a far lesser degree, the 2.4 percent of the population who are Muslim (roughly 50,000 people). Sitting on the crossroads of Western and Muslim civilization, Slovenia's Muslim community is well integrated into Slovenian society and has exhibited no overt manifestations of religious extremism. Post's strategy for combating intolerance--and deterring the rise of extremism--focuses on tolerance education, fighting against discrimination and hate speech, and promoting social dialogue and outreach to minority groups. Slovenia's Ombudsman for Human Rights and various Slovenian NGOs also take an active stand in promoting tolerance, diversity, and respect for human rights. END SUMMARY.

INTOLERANCE WITHIN SLOVENIAN SOCIETY

[1](#)2. (SBU) Intolerance and prejudice exist in Slovenia and are channeled primarily towards the Roma, homosexuals, Muslims, and immigrants from other ex-Yugoslav republics. Slovenian Roma regularly complain of discrimination in employment, housing, health services, and education (see REF B). Although the Roma living in the northeastern region of Slovenia (Prekmurje) are relatively well integrated into their local communities and experience low levels of discrimination, Roma living in the southeast (Dolenjska) often experience outright intolerance and overt discrimination, leading on occasion to inter-ethnic confrontations. Actual outbreaks of violence are quite rare, however, with only one incident of violence reported in 2005. Incidents of violence against homosexuals also occur, with several attacks and beatings reported in June and July 2005. Intolerance towards recent emigrants from other ex-Yugoslav republics remains a problem, as does prejudice against Jews. By and large, however, these negative attitudes and behaviors are more aptly characterized as intolerance and prejudice rather than xenophobic extremism.

[1](#)3. (C) The Slovenian National Party (SNS) is the sole political party outside the centrist mainstream that consistently employs nationalistic rhetoric. The SNS espouses a platform of "nationalist populism" that combines nationalism, intolerance towards minorities, and populist demagoguery. The SNS campaigned in the October 2004 parliamentary elections against equal rights for Roma and homosexuals by arguing that these constituted "special rights." SNS member and Deputy President of the National Assembly Saso Pece has famously pronounced that he would never want "to have coffee with a black man or a homosexual." The SNS has also taken a tough stance on Slovenia's relations with neighboring Croatia, Austria and Italy. SNS leader Zmago Jelenc regularly accuses Slovenia's neighbors of being "out to get" the Slovenian nation. Nevertheless, the SNS is largely a fringe party, which garnered only 6.3 percent of the vote in the 2004 elections.

[1](#)4. (C) The Muslim community in Slovenia, numbering approximately 50,000 people, is composed largely of recent immigrants from Bosnia and Albania. Muslims in Slovenia are relatively well integrated and generally espouse a moderate Islamic faith. There is little interpersonal friction between Muslims and non-Muslims. The primary irritant for Muslims living in Slovenia has been their inability to build a mosque (see REF C). Although there are no restrictions on the Muslim community's freedom of worship, plans to construct

a mosque initially ran into political opposition when a referendum was called (a common practice in Slovenia) to reject zoning changes approved by the Ljubljana Municipality to allow for the construction of the mosque. Supporters of the referendum used demagogic rhetoric to argue that construction of the mosque would lead to increased Islamic fundamentalism within Slovenia. However, in July 2004, the Constitutional Court rejected the legality of the referendum and ruled that it could not take place, thus allowing the Muslim Community to proceed with its plans to begin construction of the mosque. Embassy contacts in the Muslim

Community have repeatedly thanked the Embassy for raising this issue in its Country Report on Human Rights, and have told us that most obstacles to the construction of the mosque are behind them, though the actual sale of the parcel of land where the mosque is to be located is now being held up by a denationalization claim.

15. (S) Post is not aware of any extremist tendencies within the Muslim Community. During a September 2004 conversation with PolMil off, Slovenian Mufti Osman Dogic opined that most Muslims living in Slovenia viewed themselves equally as Muslims and as Slovenian citizens/residents. Dogic, who speaks flawless English, joked that his family was perfectly multicultural since his three children were Bosnian, Slovenian, and Australian (NOTE: Dogic has lived in each of these countries). Though Dogic is currently engaged in a bitter doctrinal dispute (and lawsuit) with Maribor Imam Ibrahim Malanovic to determine who is the rightful leader (Mufti) of the Slovenian Islamic Community, both individuals portray themselves as moderate leaders and friends of the Embassy.

EMBASSY PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE TOLERANCE AND DIVERSITY

16. (SBU) Post vigilantly monitors the press for instances of xenophobia, hate speech, and political extremism. Embassy officers have regular contact with representatives of Slovenia's minority communities, including the Roma, Jewish, Muslim, and gay/lesbian communities. Post also maintains regular contact with NGOs that work in the field of human rights and regularly exchanges information with Slovenia's independent Ombudsman for Human Rights.

17. (SBU) The Embassy has funded a variety of social and cultural events as well as NGOs that work in the field of human rights protection and anti-discrimination. The following represent a sampling of some of the most recent projects we have funded or organized in this area (per REF A):

--In September 2005, the Embassy funded a workshop on civil rights for Roma women and children living in the Dolenjska region. Impact: long term. This program is ongoing and is judged to be very effective.

--In September 2005, the Embassy funded a cultural event and information campaign titled "Stop the Violence 2005," which raised awareness of prejudice and discrimination against the Roma in the southeastern city of Novo Mesto (Dolenjska). The event was attended by numerous Roma and non-Roma citizens interested in fostering dialogue and better communication between the two communities. Impact: short term. The event was characterized by the Human Rights Ombudsman as a "terrific success."

--In August 2005, the Embassy sponsored a Holocaust education project for children. Impact: short term. The event was judged to be moderately successful. Jewish community contacts told us it was a welcome event, but opined that the Slovenian government needed to employ a more systematic approach to Holocaust education.

--In June 2005, the Embassy financed a conference on social inclusion of vulnerable minorities, which looked at social integration and ways to fight against xenophobia by improving employment policies and practices. Impact: long term. The conference was judged to be successful.

--In June 2005, the Ambassador and PolMil off visited three rural Roma communities, a Roma community center, a kindergarten, and an elementary school that served as a local model for integrating Roma and non-Roma students. Impact: short term. This trip successfully demonstrated the Embassy's concern for the well-being and rights of the Slovenian Roma and focused on the positive steps towards integration that have been made in the northeastern part of the country.

--In May 2005, the Embassy funded a project organized by the International Organization for Migration titled "Empowering Migrants: Integration through Information and Training of Public Officials and NGOs." The aim of the workshop was to provide migrants and NGOs dealing with migrant communities

with training on integration of foreigners, the rights of foreign citizens residing in Slovenia, psychological aspects of integration into the host society, communication skills, transparency in administration, and principles of good governance. Impact: long term. The project is ongoing and is judged to be very successful.

--In November 2004, the Ambassador hosted an Iftaar dinner for members of the Muslim community. Impact: short term.

The dinner was very successful and helped cement our excellent relations with the Muslim community.

--In June 2004, the Embassy funded a project on Roma education and training, designed to promote ethnic tolerance, integration, and greater social equality. The pilot project placed a Roma teaching assistant in elementary school classrooms, where s/he translated and helped Roma children learn the Slovene language, culture and history, while also serving as a liaison between Roma families and the school. Other activities included workshops for Roma mothers and pre-school children, and training for school teachers in anti-bias education, Roma culture, and history. Impact: long term. This project was very successful and serves as a long-term model for multiethnic education in the Slovenian school system.

18. (SBU) Upcoming projects also include an Embassy-sponsored conference on "Islam and the West" that will focus on the Balkans as a crossroads of Western civilization and Islam. We plan to invite progressive Islamic scholars to address the issues of cooperation and coexistence between Islam and the West.

GOS PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE TOLERANCE

19. (SBU) Slovenia's independent Ombudsman for Human Rights has been very active promoting tolerance and combating discrimination. In late 2004, the Ombudsman launched a campaign against hate speech that included a traveling exhibition documenting hate speech in the media, on the internet, in the public pronouncements of politicians, and in graffiti. The campaign has received wide media coverage and has been very successful at exposing some of the worst offenders and bringing this issue to the attention of the public. The Ombudsman has also regularly spoken out about the rights of the Roma community and the existing discrimination they face. Both the Ombudsman and Ljubljana Mayor Danica Simsic have been supportive of the Muslim Community's efforts to build a mosque and Mayor Simsic has also organized a number of events promoting tolerance for foreigners, homosexuals, and other minority groups living in Ljubljana.

COMMENT

110. (S) Slovenia sits at the crossroads of Western civilization and Islam, but is remarkably free of any significant expressions of political or religious extremism. Nevertheless, intolerance is a problem that we are vigorously working to ameliorate through financing of NGOs, workshops, conferences, Embassy outreach, and other projects that promote tolerance, diversity, and an open society. Fortunately, Slovenia has many excellent NGOs that work in this area and an active Ombudsman and media who are quick to draw attention to instances of discrimination and prejudice. Our strategy is to support human rights NGOs to the extent possible, since they form the best bulwark against the "uncivil society" represented by extremists and terrorists. NGOs and other civil society associations are the best integrated with minority communities, the most energetic, and often the most effective at identifying solutions. Post will continue working with our NGO contacts and reaching out to the minority communities living in Slovenia to promote our goals of democracy and human rights.
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